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007's Creator --- VI

An Evening with JFK

By JOHN PEARSON

Everything was going Fleming's way, everyone was becoming interested in James Bond—even John Fitzgerald Kennedy. It was during this spring of 1960 that the two men met: a casual encounter but one which was to play its part in the strange and somber story of Ian Fleming's last years.

When Fleming went to see his friend Mrs. Marion "Oats" Leiter on Sunday, March 13, she mentioned that she was dining with the Kennedys that evening. After lunch at her house she was driving Fleming through Georgetown when she spotted the Kennedys strolling along P Street. She asked them if she could bring a visitor to dinner with them that evening.

"Who's that?" asked Kennedy politely.

She introduced them. "Mr. Ian Fleming — Senator Kennedy."

Kennedy studied Fleming for a moment and said as they shook hands, "James Bond? But, of course, by all means—do please come."

There were seven for dinner at the Kennedy's house that evening, the guests being Mrs. Leiter and Ian Fleming, journalist Joseph Alsop, painter William Walton, and a man from the CIA, John Bross.

During dinner the talk largely concerned itself with the more arcane aspects of American politics and Fleming was attentive but subdued. But with the coffee and the entrance of Castro into the conversation he intervened in his most engaging style. Cuba was already high on the headache list of Washington politicians, and another of those what's-to-be-done conversations began to develop.

Fleming laughed and began to develop the theme that the United States was making altogether too

were building him up into a world figure, inflating him instead of deflating him. It would be perfectly simple to apply one or two ideas which would take all the steam out of the Cuban.

Kennedy studied the handsome Englishman, rather as puzzled admirals used to study him. Was he an oddball or something more? What ideas had Mr. Fleming in mind?

"Ridicule, chiefly," said Fleming. And with immense seriousness and confidence he developed a spoof proposal for giving Castro the James Bond treatment. There were, he said, three things which really mattered to the Cubans: money, religion, and sex. Therefore:

1. The United States should send planes to scatter Cuban money over Havana, accompanying it with leaflets showing that it came with the compliments of the United States.
2. Using the Guantanamo base, the United States should conjure up some religious manifestation, say a cross of sorts, in the sky which would induce the Cubans to look constantly skyward.
3. The United States should send planes over Cuba dropping pamphlets, with the compliments of the Soviet Union, to the effect that owing to American atom-bomb tests the at-

mosphere over the island had become radioactive; that radioactivity is held longest in beards; and that radioactivity makes men impotent. As a consequence the Cubans would shave off their beards, and without bearded Cubans there would be no revolution.

He kept his foot on the pedal for ten minutes, and it was a great success.

Early the following morning Fleming left Washington for New York, but the evening at the Kennedys was to have its own hilarious postscript. Half an hour after Fleming had left, Allen Dulles, head of the CIA, telephoned Henry Brandon, London Sunday Times correspondent and friend of Fleming. Already he had heard of the secret weapon for demolishing Castro and regretted that he wasn't able to hear about Fleming's ideas in person.

But the most important result of the evening was to come some months later; for the time being it was enough that Fleming had recruited his most important fan and that the Kennedys had been in-

trigued by the mystique which was already beginning to surround him.

From then on Fleming maintained his connection with the family, sending suitably inscribed copies of his books to Kennedy himself, to Robert Kennedy, and to their sister, Mrs. Eunice Shriver. ('I wish someone else could read it also,' said a black-edged card written to Fleming in the Spring of 1964 by the Attorney General of the U.S., Robert Kennedy, thanking him for "You Only Live Twice.") At the White House the new President would sometimes ask Brandon for news of Ian Fleming.

"Kennedy," says Brandon, "was fascinated by the line diving Ian's real life from the fantasy life that went into his books. He often asked me how such an intelligent, mature, urbane sort of man could have such an element of odd imagining in his make-up."

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